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ABSTRACT

The author provides 79 short maxims on the nature of contemporary education. An aphorism is defined as a short pithy statement of truth as perceived by the author. As an introduction, 12 characteristics of aphorisms, a short historical survey of aphorisms, and examples by well-known writers are provided. Aphorisms, usually brief, may use words interestingly, may capture penetrating perceptions in a down-to-earth manner, and are often biographical inspirational, cynical, depressing, upsetting, tragic, humorous, hortatory, and inconsistent. Frequently aphorisms may confuse a situation more than clarify it and may be void of meaning. (Author/DE)

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# APHORISMS ON EDUCATION

Raymond Muessig

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FASTBACK
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Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

**RAYMOND H. MUESSIG**

Raymond H. Muessig is in his tenth year as professor of education at The Ohio State University. Prior to that time he was associate professor of education at Purdue University, assistant professor of education at the University of Toledo, and acting instructor of education at Stanford University. He has been a visiting professor of education at the University of Minnesota, Stanford University, and the University of Massachusetts. Muessig was a classroom teacher in Longview, Washington, and Palo Alto, California, before earning his doctorate. He has served as a speaker, consultant, and demonstration teacher in many states and in other countries. A member of Phi Delta Kappa since 1959, Muessig has written and edited several publications and has appeared frequently in the *Phi Delta Kappan*.

Series Editor, Donald W. Robinson

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# APHORISMS ON EDUCATION

By Raymond H. Muessig

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been said that a "dirty" politician once hurt his opponent through a series of speeches in which he declared that the other man running for office was a well-known philanthropist whose wife was a former Thespian. I can only guess what may happen to my career when it gets around that I have become an aphorist. I am sure that my wonderful mother, may she rest in peace, had no idea that her only child would turn into an epigrammatist. But the fates have ordained that we—I, the writer, and you, the reader—should be confronted with this collection of maxims on education.

An aphorism is supposed to be a short, pithy statement of truth as perceived by an author. It remains for you to judge how well the aphorisms offered here measure up to the definition.

The adages randomly arranged and arbitrarily numbered in this fastback may serve a host of purposes. They may comfort, aid, and uplift weary or depressed parents, teachers, guidance counselors, principals, supervisors, curriculum directors, superintendents, school board members, or professors of education. Some of these precepts could arouse anger and a silent, spoken, or written rebuttal. A few could stimulate thought and motivate remedial action. Or they may only fill a temporary—though infrequent, for people involved in education—void in time.

E. M. Forster once asked, "How can I tell what I think till I see what I say?" His question struck me as relevant while preparing this manuscript. Regardless of how these aphorisms are used by others, they have given me a better understanding of my educational beliefs. I have perused many of my past utterances



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and writings to gather epigrams for this project. I have also thumbed through notes addressed to myself when I was captured by different moods. And I have penned a few new maxims that occurred to me while struggling with this small volume.

My memory, such as it is, does not stretch back far enough in my 46 years to bring forth a time when I did not devour a variety of good literature. I have long appreciated quotable quotations and used them in my discussions, lectures, speeches, reviews, articles, and books. After two-score years of reading and almost two decades of work in education, I cannot be sure that all of the sayings that appear here originated in my mind, void of any other stimulus. Although it may not be apparent, I would not have composed this particular book of aphorisms 20 years ago, or ten, or five. If I were to tackle this kind of endeavor 20 years from now, I assume that the result would be substantially different. Thus, my condensed collection must be regarded as a here and now snapshot.



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## SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF APHORISMS

Since you may be unfamiliar with the nature of aphoristic writing, I have decided to set the stage for the adages that follow with certain guidelines and protective devices.

1. Aphorisms should be brief. They may be restricted to a single sentence, and they rarely extend to more than one paragraph. Anton Checkhov said a great deal in a few words when he wrote, "Man is what he believes." In *The Aims of Education*, Alfred North Whitehead digested a profound idea into this terse sentence: "Knowledge does not keep any better than fish." Or as Eric Hoffer says in *The Passionate State of Mind*, "We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves." Brevity exacts a price, of course. "In all pointed sentences, some degree of accuracy must be sacrificed to conciseness," warned Samuel Johnson. I have had to omit qualifying words and phrases frequently in order to arrive at the maxims proffered here.

2. Aphorisms may use words interestingly. Peter Marshall, once chaplain of the U.S. Senate, concluded that "The man who doesn't stand for something will fall for anything." I have rewritten a number of my remarks three or four times in an attempt to mold them into the most intriguing, memorable form. I hope you will feel that I have been successful to a degree.

3. Aphorisms can capture penetrating perceptions in a down-to-earth manner. "The abilities of man must fall short on one side or the other, like too scanty a blanket when you are abed," observed Sir William Temple. "If you pull it upon your shoulders, your feet are left bare; if you thrust it down to your feet, your shoulders are uncovered." PDK fastbacks try to avoid technical



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verbiage, and I have done my best to respect that tradition while examining important topics.

4. Aphorisms are often autobiographical. They help thinkers to summarize their experiences, as when Thomas Henry Huxley wrote, "The longer I live, the more obvious it is to me that the most sacred act of a man's life is to say and feel 'I believe such and such to be true.' " You will discover quite a bit about Raymond H. Muessig, the person and the professional, through his epigrams.

5. Aphorisms may be inspirational. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche reassures us that "On the mountains of truth you can never climb in vain; either you will reach a point higher today, or you will be training your powers so that you will be able to climb higher tomorrow." In Horace Mann's moving, immortal baccalaureate address to the graduates of Antioch College in 1859, the year of his death, the "Father of the American Common School" issued his oft-cited challenge: "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity." It is my desire to help you, and me too, to get through a trying day or night with something I have set down in this work.

6. Aphorisms are sometimes cynical, depressing, upsetting, or tragic. Ambrose Bierce, an announced cynic, provided us with this illustration: "Politics is the conduct of public affairs for private advantage." It is depressing to read from Henry David Thoreau that "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation." One might be upset upon contemplating John Barth's statement in *The End of the Road* that "Into no cause, resolve, or philosophy can we cram so much of ourselves that there is no part of us left over to wonder and be lonely." James V. Forrestal, a U.S. cabinet member who tragically took his own life, said, "The only reason that some people have a secret sorrow is that the rest of us won't listen to them." There is a darker side of my makeup which appears occasionally in these pages.

7. Aphorisms may be humorous. I have tried to evoke a smile or a laugh from time to time in this undertaking, but I cannot pretend that I have reached the witty heights achieved by the best of aphorists. Mark Twain, for instance, advised: "Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry." In the appendix to *Man and Superman*, George



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Bernard Shaw included one of his most amusing and telling precepts: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same." America is unlikely to produce a funnier man, author, and actor than Robert Benchley. "There are several ways in which to apportion the family income, all of them unsatisfactory," he once commented. In the film *How to Train a Dog*, Benchley indicates that "It is good for a boy to have a dog. A dog teaches a boy self-reliance, trustworthiness and to turn around three times before lying down." Even Charles de Gaulle revealed a sense of humor when he asked, "How can one conceive of a one-party system in a country [France, of course] that has over 200 varieties of cheeses?" In *The McCarthy Wit*, compiled and edited by Bill Adler, I uncovered this amusing simile conceived by senator Eugene McCarthy: "Being in politics is like being a football coach. You have to be smart enough to understand the game and dumb enough to think it's important."

8. Aphorisms can have a bittersweet flavor. You might experience this sensation as you read a few of mine. Samuel Johnson was adept at this kind of saying. He observed, "To marry a second time represents the triumph of hope over experience." Or, wrote Alfred De Mussett, "How glorious it is—and also how painful—to be an exception." Alexandre Dumas commented, "Woman inspires us to great things, and prevents us from achieving them."

9. Aphorisms are frequently hortatory. There is the very real possibility that these kinds of "truths" will offend an objective, thoughtful reader. Aphoristic writing tends to force an author to sermonize more than he might in pieces directed to a restricted, highly specialized audience. As an educational aphorist, I am permitted to assume postures that I do not have to support—a rare and delightful opportunity for a professor. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, the advice Polonius, lord chamberlain, forces on his son, Laertes, serves as a good illustration:

> Neither a borrower nor a lender be;
> For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
> And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.



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10. Aphorisms may be inconsistent. Is it true, for example, that "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," as Thomas Haynes Bayly believed, or that "Out of sight is out of mind," the feeling expressed by Arthur Hugh Clough? Perhaps my epigrams cancel out each other, though that is not my intent. However, I could call upon none other than Ralph Waldo Emerson to testify in my behalf. "A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers and divines," he wrote in "Self-Reliance."

11. Aphorisms can confuse a situation more than t..ey clarify it. A young man once approached Abraham Lincoln and asked, "Should I get married or not?" Lincoln replied, "Whichever you do, you'll be sorry." Certain maxims in this fastback may provoke more questions than they provide answers. But that is supposed to be one of the signs of good teaching, is it not?

12. Aphorisms may be void of meaning. I have tried to avoid that pitfall, but there is a little Calvin Coolidge in each of us. "When more and more people are thrown out of work, unemployment results," the thirtieth President of the United States brilliantly reasoned.



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## A HISTORICAL SURVEY

Only one more pleasant task remains before I share my reflections with you. For our mutual enjoyment, I would like to take a hurried, abbreviated tour through the Land of Aphorisms from its ancient past to its present.

Aesop (620?-560? B.C.) was an early storyteller whose animal fables were used to make a point. Many of us still recall and draw upon his proverbs, such as: "Please all, and you will please none," and "It is easy to be brave from a safe distance."

Few epigrammatists have been as influential as Confucius (551-479 B.C.), or K'ung Ch'iu, the great sage of China. The *Analects* is a rambling compilation of his remarks at different times on a number of subjects that includes: "To know what you know and know what you don't know is the characteristic of one who knows," and "A man who has committed a mistake and doesn't correct it is committing another mistake."

A host of authors, including me, have quoted Heraclitus (540?-475 B.C.) who concluded that "There is nothing permanent except change."

Herodotus, who lived in the fifth century before the birth of Christ and who left us a history of the Persian Wars, wrote, "In peace, sons bury their fathers; in war, fathers bury their sons."

In the *Apology*, the reconstructed account of Socrates' (470-399 B.C.) trial, Plato has his beloved mentor say that "The unexamined life is not worth living."

If you are sufficiently interested in education in general and aphorisms in particular to have read this far, you might like



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especially the observation of Diogenes (412?-323 B.C.) that "The foundation of every state is the education of its youth."

Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a French mathematician, scientist, and writer on religious subjects, was an able and dedicated aphorist. In his *Pensées*, a beautiful collection of his thoughts, may be found the moralism for which he is probably best remembered: "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know."

Most Americans should have read or heard at least the last portion of our next quotation, though they may not know its source. "Our Constitution is in actual operation; everything appears to promise that it will last; but nothing in this world is certain but death and taxes," observed Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790).

Edmund Burke (1729-1797), an English political writer and orator, is responsible for one of my favorite utterances: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

"It is the greatest good to the greatest number which is the measure of right and wrong," wrote Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), another Englishman and an economist and philosopher.

A German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), left the world a number of astute observations. A good example is: "Life is short, but truth works fast, and lives long; let us speak the truth."

The very mention of Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), an American philosopher, writer, and poet, should bring to mind at least one of his sensitive reflections. It might be: "If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer."

Statements by Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), a Scottish historian, are frequently quoted with a proper acknowledgement or paraphrased without any citation. "Every new opinion, at its starting, is precisely in a minority of one," he opined.

Of course, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), the English poet, playwright, novelist, essayist, and critic, must be mentioned. The following aphorisms are but illustrative:

> When a man says he has exhausted life one always knows life has exhausted him.



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Selfishness is not living as one wishes to live. It is asking other people to live as one wishes to live.

Man is a reasonable animal who always loses his temper when he is called upon to act in accordance with the dictates of reasons.

A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.

"Power tends to corrupt," wrote Lord Acton (1834-1902), an English statesman and historian, "and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Oh, if leaders everywhere would but study this epigram daily!

Some participants in the current career education movement have exhumed Thomas Alva Edison's (1847-1931) belief that "Genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration."

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935), had a magnificent talent for putting into everyday language his views on the complicated problems with which he was concerned:

One fellow's freedom ends where the other fellow's nose begins.

The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theater and causing a panic.

The mind of a bigot is like the pupil of the eye; the more light you pour upon it, the more it will contract.

America's lariat-twirling, gum-chewing, cowboy philosopher, humorist, and motion picture actor and Oklahoma's favorite son, Will Rogers (1879-1935), may have abused formal English, but he struck a responsive chord with the millions who were his audience. Including his mistakes, here are a few selections from *The Will Rogers Book*, compiled by Paula McSpadden Love:

Everybody is ignorant only on different subjects.

Nobody wants his cause near as bad as he wants to talk about his cause.

You got to sorter give and take in this old world. We can get mighty rich, but if we havent got any friends, we will find we are poorer than anybody.

If you ever injected truth into politics, you would have no politics.

Although he died over a quarter of a century ago, this quotation from Charles A. Beard (1874-1948), an American historian, is still worthy of consideration: "One of the best ways to get



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yourself a reputation as a dangerous citizen these days is to go about repeating the very phrases which our founding fathers used in the great struggle for Independence."

I would probably catch it from many quarters were I to exclude something by John Dewey (1859-1952) in a publication devoted to educational aphorisms. "Only by being true to the full growth of all the individuals who make it up, can society by any chance be true to itself." In *The School and Society*, the perceptive philosopher says, "What we want is to have the child come to school with a whole mind and a whole body, and leave school with a fuller mind and an even healthier body."

Another widely and deservedly quoted American philosopher is George Santayana (1863-1952), who said, "Fanaticism consists in redoubling your efforts when you have forgotten your aim," and "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

Adlai E. Stevenson (1900-1965), an American lawyer, governor of Illinois, Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956, and U.S. representative to the United Nations, was known for his sense of humor and eloquence. In *The Wit and Wisdom of Adlai Stevenson*, assembled by Edward Hanna, Henry Hicks, and Ted Koppel, we find: "Man does not live by words alone in spite of the fact that sometimes he has to eat them," and "Technology, while adding daily to our physical ease, throws daily another loop of fine wire around our souls."

An American migratory worker, longshoreman, and philosopher, Eric Hoffer (born 1902), enjoys wide and diverse readership as a result of his aphorisms. In *The Passionate State of Mind*, Hoffer observes that "There is always a chance that the perfect society might be a stagnant society," that "We usually see only the things we are looking for—so much so that we sometimes see them where they are not," and that "To become different from what we are, we must have some awareness of what we are." And in *The Ordeal of Change* we read, "It is easier to love humanity as a whole than to love one's neighbor."

At least two contemporary, popular works contain interesting aphorisms. C. Northcote Parkinson presents "Parkinson's Law" in his book by the same name: "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." In *The Peter Principle*,


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by Laurence J. Peter and Raymond Hull, we are told that "Work is accomplished by those employees who have not yet reached their level of incompetence."

And Thomas A. Harris' recent best-seller, *I'm OK—You're OK*, provides a fitting close to our historical tour of aphorisms: "Since no two people are exactly alike, the idea of perfect compatibility is illusory."



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## APHORISMS ON EDUCATION

By this point in your reading, you should be settled into a deep, comfortable chair in your home. If it is sufficiently cool, please build a fire in your fireplace before continuing.

The remainder of this PDK fastback contains the aphorisms on education that I have penned for you and me.

1

When a 5-year-old is dressed by 7:30 each school morning for afternoon kindergarten, he is paying his teacher a supreme compliment.

2

Our seemingly ceaseless activities in professional education have little real significance unless they ultimately touch the life of an individual learner.

3

A teacher cannot be sure about the effectiveness of his work much of the time, but he knows, without a doubt, those moments when he has touched greatness.

4

An educator must have respect for the past, but he cannot make a rearview mirror his god. He has to help children and youth to function here and now, but he cannot drive by looking only at the hood of the educational automobile. He must also watch down the road and anticipate future conditions and problems. With the accelerated pace of change throughout the world, an ever-longer vision is demanded.



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5

There are few born teachers, but they especially can profit from a solid general education, sound preparation in substantive areas for which they have instructional responsibilities, and rigorous grounding in professional education. One of the biggest problems in education centers on those who will never be teachers, regardless of the quantity and quality of their training.

6

Some critics have proposed that the school be destroyed immediately. They seem to feel that the school, like the mythical phoenix, should burn itself on a funeral pyre, assuming that a new school would rise from its ashes in the freshness of youth. Yet this revolutionary—rather than evolutionary—approach would consume the amazing achievements along with the tragic mistakes. A more thoughtful and practical course open to all who care about the school and the children and youth who attend it would be to work in an energetic, dedicated, patient, and persistent manner to transform the bad into the good, the good into the better, and the better into the best.

7

John Amos Comenius optimistically believed it possible "to teach all subjects to all men," but that would have been an unattainable aim as late as the seventeenth century, even to a man of his genius. Today, a proposal to teach everything to everyone would be more apt to elicit smiles than to launch a crusade, for even a Leonardo da Vinci or a Thomas Jefferson could not keep abreast of developments in the countless fields of study that attract the attention of contemporary man.

8

There will rarely be genuine and healthy laughter in a classroom unless the teacher can laugh at a number of things in general and at himself in particular.

9

The observation that all people are different and capable of countless patterns of living is obvious and timeworn. What one does about variations in human beings is another matter. One can choose to ignore individual and cultural diversities in the hope they disappear. Or he can acknowledge their presence and

do everything possible to obscure, reduce, overrule, or eliminate multiformities in values, feelings, capabilities, wants, and actions. Still a third alternative—the one that seems most compatible with an open society—is to enjoy, prize, foster, and protect distinctness in man. Would that all teachers opt for the third possibility.

10

Children start school asking "Why?" about everything. They leave school asking why they had to spend so much time there.

11

For years many people in professional education have stated that a major source of our problems is tied to the need for objectives. Some writers imply that the more objectives, the merrier. However, the real difficulty is not that we have lacked important and sufficient goals but that we have done little to make our aims operational in the undertakings of our students and have even undermined our announced ends with our day-to-day actions. It is better for the teacher to do something functional with a few objectives than to file a long list of purposes in the top drawer of her desk.

12

The individualization and personalization of learning is not easy, even on a long-term, tutorial basis. It is many times more difficult when a teacher has brief, superficial contacts with many students.

13

The cult of efficiency, which has enslaved the minds of many Americans in business and industry, has tried repeatedly to ensnarl education. But whoever said that education is an efficient process? Can education be likened to the printing and mailing out of bills or to the production of plastic drinking glasses? I think not.

14

When everything that goes on in a school ceases to be fun for everyone involved, then we're in a heap of trouble!

15

Every teacher should keep a scrapbook of thank you notes



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from students, parents, and colleagues, from newspaper clippings recalling accomplishments of his pupils, certificates awarded for different kinds of service, and the like. Few remedies can help fight inevitable personal and professional periods of depression more than evidence that one has made a difference, however slight it may seem at times, because he existed and labored in and out of the classroom.

16

It is an unfortunate circumstance in education that the master classroom teacher, who might have important and useful things to write about education, almost never has the spare time and the extra supply of energy necessary to take pen in hand.

17

Just because a person is an authority in one field does not make him an expert in another. A man may know a great deal about rocket propellants without possessing educational insights.

18

Students need to develop flexible, creative conceptual styles instead of rigid, closed modes. They should not be forced to put their marbles into the game of life too soon and to play for keeps before they have had a chance to try out many skills and to examine a broad spectrum of ideas.

19

There are teachable moments when students can and will be reached. There are other times when nothing done in the classroom will make any difference. Being able to distinguish between the two separates the educational craftsman from the drudge.

20

The assumption, embraced by too many people, that education is an ever-onward, ever-upward endeavor is unsupported by examined experience. There are upward and downward slopes, peaks and valleys, vast plateaus, progressions and regressions in education. There are many attempts which take on the appearance of change, but progress is neither continuous nor inevitable.

21

There is something seriously wrong with an educational sys-



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tem in which a second-class school principal receives a higher salary than a first-rate classroom teacher.

22

All homework in elementary and secondary schools should be forever abolished. The school day is long enough already, and learners rarely have at home the materials, facilities, equipment, and instructional guidance necessary for thorough, meaningful study.

23

The function of evaluation is to facilitate the growth of learners. It is not to label youngsters like canned goods, to sort them like letters, or to grade them like eggs. Evaluation should not be used to reward or punish pupils but to help them find out where they are, how they are coming along, and what they need to progress.

24

From their offerings and the techniques they employ, many teachers seem to prefer answers to questions, conclusions to hypotheses, knowns to unknowns, sureties to doubts, certainties to uncertainties, absolutes to relatives, pronouncements to dialogues, products to processes, predigested facts to raw data, museums to laboratories, sedatives to stimulants, and balms to tonics. (Whether any of this will change must remain an open—and probably long unanswered—question.)

25

Education seems quite simple if one is on the outside looking in. It is extremely complex on the inside. As Robert Townsend, chairman of the board of Avis, put it in *Up the Organization*, "The Charge of the Light Brigade was ordered by an officer who wasn't there looking at the territory." The best criticisms and recommendations for improvements are generated by professionals who know the territory.

26

It is when a teacher loses himself most in his work and his students that he is most likely to find his best personal and professional self.

27

Anyone who teaches the first grade deserves to be canonized.



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The first grade is the most important single year of the total school experience, and the teachers who work with 6-year-olds all day are among our unsung saints.

28

One student's opinion, informed or not, is not as good as any other pupil's expressed belief, warranted or not. Many classroom discussions are but a pooling of ignorance and may cause considerable damage without doing any good.

29

Vittorino da Faltre, a Renaissance teacher, called his school *La Giocosa*—the pleasant house. What an apt name for a school! It should be a nice home away from home!

30

Secondary schools should terminate the timeworn system of prepackaging students in fixed batches of 30 for 50 minutes a period, for six tightly scheduled periods a day, and for every long day throughout an entire school year. Each learner ought to do some independent study for individually adjusted amounts of time, ranging from an hour a week for a week or more to six or seven hours a week for a month or so. Groups of pupils should be formed and reformed on an almost continuous basis according to current needs, interests, abilities, and a number of other factors, not on some a priori basis such as intelligence quotients, previous grades, or teachers' ratings from the preceding school year.

31

The groan emitted by a group of students when a bell ends a great class session is one of the best tributes any teacher can receive.

32

Education is a privilege not a duty, a precious and wonderful opportunity not a commonplace and dreary obligation, a chance to grow not a responsibility to be planted. It is hard to compel a student to learn, easy to guide him when he has a thirst for knowledge. A doctor cannot give his patient the will to live, nor can a teacher force his pupils to seek enlightenment. If every possible effort to encourage a learner has been rejected, the stu-



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dent should be left to his own pursuits until he enters the halls of ideas on his own.

33

Each teacher has his own philosophy, his special hallmarks. It is impossible for him to be exactly like his colleagues. The teacher is constantly engaged in acts that bear his imprint. A grade on a report card, for example, is as much the creation of the teacher as it is anything else. A teacher is not just a teacher in a standardized, stereotypic sense. A teacher may be male or female, single or married or divorced, a parent or a person who has no children, a generalist or a specialist, a scholar or one who interprets the scholarship of others, a dedicated professional or an individual who has merely secured a steady job. In short, teachers are not interchangeable parts!

34

Simply because the students in a class are busy doing something, anything, does not mean that they are learning. Requiring pupils to cut turkeys out of pieces of colored paper at Thanksgiving, to make "Eskimo igloos" out of sugar cubes, to construct forts out of tongue depressors, to paint any kind of mural that comes to mind, to copy senseless passages out of offhandedly selected pages in encyclopedias, to form groups to buzz about whatever occurs to them, to role-play or simulate for the sake of role-playing or simulation, ad nauseam, is a waste of everyone's time.

35

Rules in a school should be held to an absolute minimum. Whenever it is discovered that there was no good reason for a rule in the first place, that a once needed regulation no longer has a purpose, or that the enforcement of some dictum causes more problems than it alleviates, the rule should be joyfully abolished.

36

The idea that each learner is unique is as old as the literature of education, yet we continue to think of learners in terms of schools, classes, and groups. To look at a so-called seventh-grade aggregate is to be confronted with heterogeneity. The challenge



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that still faces the teacher is fitting a tailor made educational garment to each wearer.

37

A number of scholarly groups have not yet realized that it is both undesirable and impossible to make chemists' chemists or geographers' geographers out of children and youth. Some youngsters should form interests in single or allied subjects so they will be able to pursue advanced and perhaps specialized study in institutions of higher learning, but this cannot be the sole purpose of a public school curriculum constructed for a highly diverse clientele.

38

Frankly, I don't see how anyone in a secondary school can teach five or six classes of 30 students each for a working lifetime. If more people knew what teaching is really like, they would not trade their working conditions, their loads, their salaries, and their status for those of a teacher. Many dedicated, intelligent, competent, creative, sensitive classroom teachers keep plugging away, even though they are damned if they help and damned if they don't help the disparate individuals and groups they try so hard to serve.

39

Some teaching results in learning. Occasionally one child learns and 29 do not; or five learn and 25 do not; or 27 learn and three do not. Sometimes students learn in spite of teachers or when no really meaningful teaching has taken place. Occasionally learners teach each other more than they derive from their teacher. But even the best of teachers cannot guarantee uniform results with an entire class. For more reasons than any one person can list, the concept of accountability—fashionable at the present time—is riddled with holes.

40

General study halls should be eliminated. They should not have been created in the first place, and they serve no purpose in an enlightened educational system today. Study should take place in classrooms, seminar lounges, laboratories, the general library, and numerous other appropriate places—including colleges and universities—away from the secondary school, not in



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the customary multiuseless room, cafeteria, or gymnasium supervised by a home economics teacher one period and a mathematics teacher the next.

41

There are times when I wish I had never become a teacher. However, I cannot think of anything I would rather have done with my entire life than to labor in the educational vineyard.

42

I have encountered a number of guidance counselors and school psychologists who talk a lot about "adjustment." A big part of their work, they say, is helping students to "adjust." The well-adjusted person, as they perceive him, is the one who "fits in," "gets along with the system," and "accepts his situation." If this is their goal, guidance counselors and school psychologists may hand back to the schools counselees who are intellectual, emotional, social, and aesthetic vegetables. "Maladjusted" people are the ones who are dissatisfied with the way things are, who fight stupidities and injustices. Let's hope for more "maladjusted" pupils who will push for needed reforms.

43

Rarely can or should local teachers settle for a teacher-proof curriculum design produced by an individual or group on the outside. Teachers can uncover, consider, employ, and modify carefully selected ideas from other school districts, publishers, and projects, but in most cases they must think through the demands of their own locale and build a curricular structure from the ground up.

44

Just because a coach has had more wins than losses does not mean that he is qualified to be a principal. Historically, a principal-teacher was a master in the classroom who merited the respect, admiration, and affection of his fellow teachers. "Do as I say, and not as I do," is the modus operandi of too many principals. Why don't teachers elect their principals on a temporary, rotating basis from their ranks?

45

The chronological age of a teacher is a poor a priori basis on which to anticipate his performance in the classroom. I have ob-



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served young teachers who are always tired, rarely enthusiastic, seldom innovative, firmly set in their ways, frequently cross with students, and so on. I have watched teachers approaching mandatory retirement who are "young," dynamic, alive, creative, charismatic, closely related to their pupils, and so on. Some individuals should be "retired" before they start. Certain rare and magnificent artists in the classroom should be retained until they—not others—insist that the time has come to fade away.

46

There is a danger in categorizing groups of people. A person's distinctness, dignity, and integrity can be violated by an arbitrary designation. One should be wary of talking in general about girls, second graders, adolescents, Unitarians, Oregonians, or Democrats. It is equally risky in particular to lump variegated learners under headings such as gifted, average, slow, retarded, advantaged, or culturally deprived.

47

"Problem children" are usually "children with problems." We should focus on causes, rather than symptoms.

48

With reference to many outside critics of education, it is easy to be a gadfly, an iconoclast, a Monday morning quarterback, or a perennial protester. It is much harder to put up or shut up. As if it were the weather, countless people talk and write about education; there must be more self-styled experts on education than there are children and youth in classrooms. But very, very few persons do anything about it by working long and hard to bring about obviously and desperately needed reforms. A number of the authors of best-selling, hortatory books that condemn education, educators, teachers, and administrators have never worked in schools or have thrown in the towel after facing a year or two of difficulty. They complain loudly and bitterly; they toss out unsupported charges and hasty, faulty generalizations like a kitchen toaster gone beserk; they collect generous royalties for their books and fat fees for their speeches, but they do not struggle in education year after year.

49

The day of a curriculum based on the procedure of dividing

the number of pages in a textbook by the number of days in the school year and then plodding along with the same old assign-study-recite-test routine must come to a close. When the textbook serves as a security blanket, it smothers effective teaching.

50

Teaching can be narrowly or broadly conceived. One can arrive at the school building just in time for his first class and race students out the door when the final bell sounds. Or, one can take phone calls at home, visit a student who is ill in the hospital, attend weddings and funerals, and send cards on various occasions. It has been a source of surprise and satisfaction for me to discover the doors that can be opened when a personal approach is taken. I still have students who remind me of little things I did in the past that assumed real importance to them but that I had forgotten.

51

There cannot, and should not, be equal—in the sense of identical—educational opportunity for children and youth as a mass. What is needed is open educational opportunity, a chance for each special, wonderful learner to become his own best self. Just as an automotive mechanic must do varied things to solve unique performance problems, so must the teacher alter his actions to the requirements of the particular student.

52

Numerous critics of education want to wipe clean the societal slate in general and the educational chalkboard in particular. They have little evidence that by abandoning all cultural traditions and by "deschooling" all institutions of learning they could form completely fresh human relationships. They do not ask whether new structures would remain forever flexible or gradually resist change and become as bad as, or worse than, those we now have. They want to throw the baby out with the bath, and they oppose all attempts to preserve some ideas and practices that have demonstrated their value over the years. It is an all-or-nothing phobia that possesses them and makes them myopic.

53

The older he gets and the more experience he accumulates, the harder it is for an honest professional to promulgate some



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of the widely asserted truisms that have become part of the warp and woof of the fabric of education.

54

The last thing the program of the school should do is to shorten the physical, intellectual, social, and aesthetic existence of a student by boring him to death.

55

There has never been a truly homogeneous group of learners in the sense that all members are identical with respect to every factor that could be considered.

56

Rare is the teacher who can submit an idea for classroom discussion and then give up possession of it, who can lay a thought on the table for study and see it rejected or revised, who can defend his proposals objectively and calmly, and who can criticize his own views and receive criticism of them without being defensive or offensive.

57

I once knew a man whose favorite drink was a gin and tonic. He used a well-known brand of spirits flavored with choice juniper berries, the very best quinine water, and the juice from a fresh lime to create his masterpiece. In a relaxed mood one evening, he observed that he had never succumbed to malaria or beriberi because of his taste in beverages. He was aware of the faulty cause-and-effect relationship in his statement, but many critics of the schools are not. Increased crime in our society is blamed on schools, and people are unemployed in America because—and again schools are blamed. But these seemingly simple connections are questionable, indeed. For example, children may read less and at a lower level than previously because their parents are infrequent and poor readers who set a bad example or because television discourages reading or because. . . . It must be remembered that there are multiple causes for most effects.

58

At best, a perceptive teacher has a sort of wide-angle picture in his mind of each of his classes. A few students, captured in



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the center of the mental lens, will be in sharp focus, will be seen accurately, will be known and understood well, will be taught effectively, will be recalled easily and long. Most learners' essential details are recorded less sharply. And a small group, at the edge of the lens where distortion is the greatest and the photo the fuzziest, will be captured so poorly that damage is done to their image and resultant teacher actions. One shot of a class is insufficient. Many lenses, views, poses, moments must be caught to bring more students into maximal depth of field.

59

Borrowing the basic form of—but changing some nouns in—an aphorism by Cocteau, children, youth, and inexperienced teachers may cut some of the Gordian knots in education which experienced teachers, administrators, and teacher educators have spent lifetimes trying to untie.

60

As a beginning classroom teacher, I was quite critical of parents. I even delivered addresses to groups of parents in my earlier years in education. Now, having tried to share in the raising of two sons, who have somehow reached 21 and 17 and are both bigger than me, I have consumed so much humble pie that I seldom criticize or advise parents.

61

Many kinds of people are important in many kinds of learning. Numerous significant others can and should help a student to develop his concept of himself as a person, a social being, and a learner—to find out what he knows and does not know and to expand his horizons, to identify and to project the consequences of what he values, to spell out and to analyze the problems he faces and the alternatives that are open to him, and to establish and to strengthen warm, rewarding human relationships. The school must not be constricted by its property lines or the clocks on its walls. Actually and vicariously, it must put learners in touch with the reflections and emotions of thousands of people, near and far, living and dead.

62

The principal whose "snoopervision" consists solely of standing briefly in the hallway outside of a classroom or tuning in oc-



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casionally and surreptitiously on the public address system centered in his office should be drummed out of the profession. He must sit in innumerable classes, again and again, to form even a beginning impression of what is going on.

63

Some people today propose that we take each overall educational objective and break it down into a host of minute "behavioral objectives" or "performance criteria." Component parts cannot be as significant as the whole and may even become trivial, fragmented, shortsighted. Some teachers are now spending more time writing down piecemeal objectives than thinking through ways to reach their students. Commercially available lists of hundreds of finite objectives dealing with almost everything make it possible for the teacher to become more a robot and less a human being.

64

Problems are frequently linked to each other and cannot be isolated easily or solved on an individual basis. In his efforts to sell the American common school, Horace Mann promised more than the schools could deliver. The school has suffered ever since from impossible expectations. All by itself it cannot take the credit for America's successes or the blame for the country's failures. The school cannot do everything, cannot be all things to all people, especially when it is nowhere near the top of the list of financial allocations. Poverty, unemployment, lack of decent—let alone really open—housing, the inadequacy of the American legal system to ensure equal protection under the law, America's defense psychosis, and so on are all part of a long chain of problems. It seems more likely that inadequate and sometimes deplorable schools are weather vanes; they indicate the prevailing direction of social winds but do not cause a particular kind of weather.

65

A flexible schedule may become as inflexible as any other system that attempts to allocate fixed amounts of time in advance of student needs, interests, and abilities. With large group instruction—often found in schools on a flexible schedule—it is unlikely that all of a given teacher's classes will be investigat-

ing the same problem at the same time and in an identical manner. Using a particular film, a given panel, or a certain speaker to instruct or stimulate a substantial number of learners on an identical date does not work out very often. Allocating ninety minutes' worth of modules every Monday morning for the same collection of 300 pupils prior to the start of a school year has obvious drawbacks. It appears, rather, that students should take fewer subjects during the school year; they should have more uncommitted time for individual pursuits, and their schedules and obligations should be adjusted on a week-to-week or even a day-to-day basis wherever and whenever possible in a more informal fashion.

66

Many of my university students, teachers in schools where I consult and speak, and even professors of education with whom I come in contact have an appallingly weak grasp of educational history. Unaware of what was done in schools in ancient Greece and thereafter and of thoughts expressed from Socrates on, these unlearned preprofessionals and practitioners keep trying to discover fire or to invent the wheel. "New" approaches emerge constantly that have been proposed and even tested for centuries. Why must we ignore the past and try to start from scratch?

67

There is a teaching conscience as well as a personal inner voice, and this deep down moral censor must be cultivated and obeyed. When the teacher's early warning system says, "This I must do for the sake of a given student," or "This I must not do if I wish to remain true to myself and my calling," it cannot be ignored often or long, or it dims and becomes silent, and so does an important part of the teacher. It is easy to operate according to the book, but not always ultimately right. I have made some mistakes by following policy to the letter, and I have done some decent things by making exceptions.

68

A spirit of tentativeness is essential in our country and in our educational system. With only the haziest notion of what the twenty-first century may hold in store for our world, our nation,



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and our youth, we cannot draft complete, firm plans based upon an unyielding set of assumptions.

69

Whenever a teacher writes a recommendation for one of his students, the teacher is involved in a sacred act. Before a pen is set to paper or a printed form is inserted into a typewriter, the teacher should take a deep breath, pause, and ask himself various questions. Do I know this pupil well enough to make any kind of accurate statement? Can I be fair where an analysis of this learner is concerned? Can I honor both my obligation to the student, who trusts me enough to put a portion of his life and his future in my hands, and to the reader of my recommendation, who counts on me to help him judge an applicant's potentialities—with all of the complex, long-range consequences that attend this act? Can I choose my words so accurately and cautiously that I will say what I mean and mean what I say? What might I do if I were to make a decision based on this recommendation? Would I want the student to read what I have said and to discuss my perceptions with him? If I have only foggy answers to questions such as these, should I make the honest, but difficult and unpopular choice not to honor the request for a recommendation?

70

The curriculum worker who seeks a final, authoritative statement on the exact composition of biology or English or history or some other area which all scholars will accept can anticipate results similar to those obtained by Ponce de Leon in his search for the fountain of youth.

71

In far too many places throughout the nation, students view the school as a cold, aloof, negative, punitive, joyless, boring, irrelevant, bureaucratic, petrified institution. Rather, it should be seen and experienced as a warm, friendly, positive, rewarding, happy, vital, relevant, flexible, growing human community. We wonder why certain of our pupils regard our educational edifices as penitentiaries when we expect youngsters to account for their activities every minute, pass from class to class at the same time if not in unison, carry hall passes even to drinking fountains



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and toilets, consume lunches (as early as 10:30, hungry or not, or as late as 1:30, starved or not) in 20 minutes after waiting in long lines, and "serve sentences" after school to make up for "lost time." We are apparently afraid to leave our "inmates" alone anywhere, any time, for we patrol school bus zones, doorways, hallways, study halls, libraries, and cafeterias.

72

Whenever a person begins a statement about a complex, amorphous, variable problem in education with "Research says . . .," you can rightly be suspicious of whatever follows.

73

Whether one likes or believes it or not, all teaching involves some degree of indoctrination. When the teacher emphasizes this objective over that one, selects content A instead of B, employs a given method while shelving another technique, utilizes certain materials and not others, or evaluates student progress through a procedure that takes the place of an alternative approach, he has made a choice. Since the teacher must take a stand, he should be aware of this necessity to minimize those forms of indoctrination most likely to damage his integrity or that of his students.

74

A quality control inspector in a mammoth automobile factory, where unit following unit is turned out during a work day as quickly as possible, may take pride in the uniform appearance of the finished product. A teacher, on the other hand, should be disturbed if there is a deadly dull sameness in his students' endeavors. He should be upset if the paintings in an art class resemble each other, if one English essay after another seems to have come from the same pen, if all of the members of a social studies class arrive at an identical position on a highly controversial issue.

75

When a teacher does not know or has forgotten why he is doing such and such a thing in the classroom, he is on the edge of a perilous swamp. Wherever and whenever possible, he should stop immediately and move on to firmer ground where his step is sure, his purpose clear.



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76

There are few things more frustrating or less helpful than this comment found on so many report cards: "George is not working up to capacity." Does anyone ever work up to his full capacity all of the time? And could he, day in and day out, without suffering a physical and/or a mental breakdown?

77

The most meaningful and enduring change comes from within an individual. Changes forced on a person from the outside—through coarse or refined coercion, manipulation, inculcation, or indoctrination—are less likely to take root and flourish than those the person desires for himself.

78

Too many teachers look constantly for failure in others rather than examining their own errors, weaknesses, and faults. How wonderful and rare it is to hear a teacher say, "I'm sorry that I . . .," or "I was wrong about . . .," or "It was insensitive of me to say that. . . ." Teachers gain, not lose, stature when they admit being fallible.

79

A student's request for help—almost any kind of assistance, however unimportant it may appear on the surface—is a genuine compliment and an unusual opportunity. It says, "I am reaching out to you, and I trust you." The pupil's appeal for aid can open future possibilities for a deeper relationship and more significant, enduring service. A teacher should, therefore, think twice before ignoring any plea that comes his way.



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